

Giant cable companies should not be permitted to grow larger. Further consolidation in the cable industry is a clear violation of horizontal ownership rules that must be re-established to serve the public interest.

The concentration of power and control over distribution of media is a growing problem in this country. Though we have more channels available than ever before, they are under the operation of a handful of giant corporations.

If Comcast and Time Warner are allowed to merge with Adelphia, the two companies will control nearly 50 percent of the national market. This level of concentration in the cable industry will lead to higher consumer rates and

lower quality
service.

Since passage of the
Telecommunications
Act of 1996 and the
“deregulation” of
cable, consumers
have seen their
rates jump an
average of 59
percent — with some
areas experiencing
even more dramatic
increases.

We are required to
buy channels we
don’t want or need
because the cable
operators bundle
them together. The
quality of customer
service often
reflects the fact
that cable
television is not a
competitive market.

Meanwhile, the cost
of cable modem
service remains out
of reach for many
households, holding
constant for years
and selectively
underserving rural
and low-income
Americans. The

American people are watching the digital divide widen even as the need for access to high-speed networks increases.

Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments.

In many communities, the truly independent sources of local news, information and culture come from the public channels produced at the local access centers.

Unfortunately, local channels lack the resources to produce the programming that citizens want and need.

The last thing we need is to reward the anti-competitive actions of cable giants by permitting greater consolidation in ownership, reducing competition, and encouraging more of the same. There is still good reason for ant-trust laws.

When you turn on your TV in prime time and find people eating worms, doesn't it give you pause? When the late breaking news is about a new release of Star Wars, do you think there are other stories that could be more important? By all accounts, journalism has deteriorated so that it now makes sense to read the foreign press for reliable information. Without good information, there can be no democracy.

Robert McChesney,
the author of "The
Problem of the
Media" and other
fine books, likens
the market for media
to the portrayal in
the Godfather when
"Michael Corleone,
Hyman Roth, and the
heads of the U.S.
gangster families
meet on a patio in
Havana to "divide"
up pre-Communist
Cuba. Roth
ceremonially gives
each gangster a
piece of Cuba as he
slices his birthday
cake, which has the
outline of Cuba on
it. As Roth doles
out the slices, he
applauds the Batista
government for
favoring private
enterprise- that is,
letting the
gangsters plunder
the country. The
gangsters fight
among themselves to
get the biggest
slice of Cuba-
indeed the film
revolves around this
theme-but they agree
that they alone

should own Cuba.

Therefore, it is with media policy making in the United States. Massive corporate lobbies duke it out with each other for the largest share of the cake, but it is their cake."

In spite of the threat to democracy from concentrated media, Michael Powell, backed by President Bush, supported still lower thresholds on media ownership rules. Media issues, like many others decided by the Bush administration, are largely decided in secret by major corporations who vigorously oppose any public representation. Surprisingly, in the case of Powell's determination to loosen the ownership rules, there was a massive outcry.

It appears the FCC

is run for the
benefit of the major
players, not the
public.